

Thunder showers keep skipping the same parts of the Shortgrass Country. Ten miles west of the ranch house the grass looks like lush spring growth. On the wrong side the line we stay on the verge of selling out or on the brink of sending out the feed wagon.

For the tenth month of winter my layout looks well organized. Down by the highway the whole lamb and calf crop was cashed in July for a festival of featherweight scale receipts. On the last day of the month the final winter feed bill for 1992 and 1993 landed face-up in the post office, marked off with enough places to take all of the lamb and calf money plus the down payments on the hunting leases.

At Mertzon the new school tax laws delayed surface evaluations in the appraisal offices; on the post office bulletin board, a computer notice from the IRS demanded a closer declaration of estimated income for 1993.

Stuck on the pickup dashboard was an appointment card for a check-up at Angelo Clinic on Aug. 16 at 10:30 a.m. Probably the last time possible to see a San Angelo doctor in these closing years of the 20th. Also, on the same clip board was a reminder from the exterminator: termite damage on three houses needs to be rechecked before Sept. 1.

The telephone company, in a neat envelope, claimed to have credited the Mertzon phone \$25 for failing to restore the number in 24 hours. A magazine headquartered in Pleasantville, N.J., in the same post, promised to correct a computer error of \$68.63 on the next billing in October.

Via the wire service, the strongest buyer of black muley calves in the Shortgrass Country withdrew from the market because of the flooding on the Mississippi. He signed off with the

fateful words: "The worst is yet to come."

On the same day, the Red Cross wrote asking for donations for flood relief. The appeal, however, left out whether donations could be designated to cattle buyers and corn farmers.

Later in the week a big feed outfit east of San Angelo, reacting from the same flooding, quoted natural range cubes up \$27 a ton f.o.b. the mill. The offer of a three percent cash discount in 10 days came across weak and inconclusive.

At this writing we have caught our limit of three-tenths of an inch on about 300 acres of our driest country. If August gets a little cooler, we won't have to start back feeding until after Labor Day.

I've seen this old country look a lot worse, but in those times we weren't lucky enough to be in such close contact with the outside world.